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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003139

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: FINDING A HOME: IRANIAN KURDISH REFUGEE RELOCATION
FROM AL TASH TO SULAIMANIYA HITS A SNAG

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1875

[B](#). BAGHDAD 1386

[C](#). BAGHDAD 1084

[D](#). AMMAN 1232

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David Satterfield for reasons 1.

4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary. UNHCR-Amman hosted a July 20-21 meeting among stakeholders involved in the voluntary relocation of some 3,000 Iranian Kurdish Refugees from the Al Tash refugee camp outside Ramadi (Al Anbar governorate) to Sulaimaniya governorate. Despite reported high-level KRG support for the move, local Kurdish authorities raised many, often specious, arguments to delay the immediate relocation of the Al Tash population. The meeting concluded with a plan for UNHCR-Amman's Head of Delegation to meet with local Kurdish authorities in Sulaimaniya or Erbil in early August. The movement of this camp population remains an Embassy priority on both humanitarian and security grounds, and we plan a senior-level demarche to the KRG to help ensure on-the-ground support for speedy relocation. End Summary.

REFUGEES IN HARM'S WAY

[2](#). (C) The Al Tash refugee camp operates under UNHCR authority and protection and is located near the hub of the insurgency in Al Anbar province (reftels). Due to security concerns, UNHCR has been unable to provide adequate protection or assistance to the approximately 3,000 Iranian Kurdish residents since late 2003. Insecurity in the camp led to the flight of refugees to the Iraq-Jordan border in 2004, with 209 currently sheltering in squalid conditions at the Trebil crossing point. UNHCR and Jordanian authorities fear more could move to the border unless conditions in Al Anbar improve or refugees relocate to more secure areas in the North. In recent months, residents have expressed concern to MoDM and to RefCoord that insurgents may be using Al Tash as a safe haven.

[3](#). (C) UNHCR informed RefCoord/Baghdad on May 2, 2005 that it has secured an agreement in principle with relevant authorities in Baghdad and the KRG to relocate camp residents to the North and convened a meeting July 20-21 in Amman to review timing and logistics for the move and ancillary assistance. Attendees included Sulaimaniya and Erbil representatives Hoshyar Siwaily (Deputy Minister-Ministry of Humanitarian Aid and Cooperation (MoHAC), Abdullah Abdul-Karim Mohammed (KRG Sulaimaniya), and Dindar Zebary (KRG Coordinator for the UN) with Minister of Displacement and Migration (MODM) Suhaila Abd Jaafar al Kaneony, as well as representatives of UNHCR, State/PRM, Embassy Baghdad, and NGO Mercy Hands. The other main implementing partner, Swedish NGO Qandil, was unable to attend.

READY TO BEGIN MOVEMENTS IN AUGUST

[4](#). (C) UNHCR's implementing partner in Al Anbar, Mercy Hands NGO, briefed on their survey work and the overwhelming support for the move amongst the Al Tash refugees. As of 21 July, Mercy Hands had interviewed 301 families (55% of those in the camp) and completed 261 Voluntary Relocation Forms (VRFs). All respondents rejected repatriation to Iran, citing destruction of homes and political opposition, and 40 families refused relocation from Al Tash to the north. Ninety-nine percent of those wishing to move prefer to relocate to Sulaimaniya governorate, with few listing Erbil or Dohuk.

[5](#). (C) UNHCR briefed on its plan to assist in the voluntary relocation beginning in August and concluding by the end of October. UNHCR implored both the MODM and KRG to facilitate the move quickly in order to avert a humanitarian disaster in the camp. UNHCR has already begun preliminary information outreach to Al Tash residents to inform them about details of the move.

KRG THROWS UP OBSTACLES TO RELOCATION

16. (C) KRG representatives, especially Sulaimaniya's Abdullah Abdul-Karim, pushed back against UNHCR's proposal to begin relocations in August, arguing that proper approvals were still lacking. UNHCR's Head of Delegation Amin Awad explained forcefully the trail of agreements it has secured with the KRG beginning in 2003, including at Talabani's level, and reminded KRG participants they were at the meeting as technicians responsible for implementation and not politicians. Erbil's Hoshyar Siwaily noted that agreement was given 'in principle', but that details still need to be worked out. These details included requirements concerning biographic information so the KRG security apparatus could give clearance, adding this could take up to two months; and detailed family information to determine if schools can absorb new students.

17. (C) The new Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration declared the national government's support for the move and offered coordination with the Ministry of Interior to ensure safe transit to the north. The Minister also offered coordination between her ministry and the governorate authorities to finalize preparations for the move. UNHCR and State/PRM representatives repeatedly intervened with KRG representatives noting that Al-Anbar's insecurity necessitates urgent relocation of refugees. These interventions were met with rhetorical statements of support for 'our Iranian-Kurdish brothers and sisters', but without agreement on a speedy move.

UNHCR PRESSING FOR RESULTS BUT NEEDS SUPPORT

18. (C) UNHCR, MoDM, and KRG authorities agreed to meet in northern Iraq between 31 July and 5 August to reach final agreement on the mechanisms and timing for the relocation. To help disarm the KRG of any excuses for delaying the move, Mercy Hands will seek additional information from the refugees to more thoroughly respond to KRG concerns. (Note: Embassy now understands the meeting is planned for August 10 in Erbil and that UNHCR is seeking clearances from UNAMI and UN/New York to send two officers from Amman to this meeting. End note)

COMMENT

19. (C) UNHCR's leadership on this issue is welcome, and the meetings were useful in revealing obstacles to progress on this issue. The upcoming meeting between UNHCR's Head of Delegation and KRG authorities could be pivotal to shoring up Kurdish support for the relocation. This relocation is a priority for our refugee work on both security and humanitarian grounds. Furthermore, we hope a successful relocation would prompt movement of refugees off the Iraq-Jordan border, relieving pressure on MNF-I and Iraqi border forces. We plan to raise this refugee issue with KRG leadership to help ensure the upcoming UNHCR-KRG meeting is fruitful and concludes with local buy-in. End comment.

110. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.
Khalilzad